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Winter and Skynyrd are high voltage

Edgar Winter (left) and Rick Derringer, who played at the Forum last night.

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

It was a night of very loud and very rocking music last night at the Forum, in the company of the Edgar Winter Group with Rick Derringer, and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

To have two such high voltage bands on the same bill was a treat for the crowd of about 5,000. It afforded an opportunity to see the different ways each group attempted to move the audience's bodies and fill their heads with sound at the same time.

The opening act was Lynyrd Skynyrd, a quintet from Atlanta, emanating from the Southern U.S. rock explosion spurred by the success of the Allman Brothers. Not that they try to blow the latter group off the face of the scene, a mistake several other unfortunates have fallen prey to.

Skynyrd were surprising in their subtle devotion to basic rock 'n' roll rhythm; they've obviously grown up with the archetypal forms of Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis. From there, they've extended the country-rock genre with an attack that touches upon both bluegrass and boogie-blues.

Their volume is contemporary — loud — but they are restrained enough and attuned to each other's harmonics so as to ensure an amazingly elastic sound. They zing along with a sense of purpose: No nonsense, no histrionics, just superbly consistent rock 'n' roll.

HONKY-TONK

It was also refreshing to hear the acoustic piano honkytonking along at a lively volume level, the web of guitars and rock 'n' roll rhythm. Lynyrd Skynyrd was called back for an encore, in which they thrilled the crowd with a lilting and loud elegy to the late Duane Allman and Berry Oakley.

The Edgar Winter Group was flashier and more eclectic, but sometimes their tricky phraseology — embracing a wide variety of influences — was too cranked-out to sound real.

Technically, however, the group is a blockbuster. The white-haired gaunt Winter plays near "yakety-yak" saxophone in a frenetically energetic manner, and his keyboard work has both color and humor (he also played a lot more acoustic piano than usual).

Complementing Edgar's reckless combustion is the ever-present strutting guitar of Rick Derringer, a tiny young veteran of the old mid-1960s McCoys (Hang On Sloopy) and producer of both Johnny and Edgar Winter's records.

KICK OFF

It was up to him to really kick off the proceedings with his own anthem, Rock and Roll Hoochie Coo: He is a bouncing bundle of nerves. The powerhouse rhythm section of bassist Dan Hartman and drummer Chuck Ruff gave the two leaders an impenetrable foundation, and the group members switched instruments on occasion.

They whipped out numbers culled from their last two albums, as well as updatings of such "greaser rock" as Jennie With the Red Dress On. There were heavy doses of jazz and soul styles, yet they often sounded too "slotted-in" to be emotionally satisfying. Their technique was pulverizing and, thus, all-embracing.

It's not that this band has no ideas — they are much more ambitious than Lynyrd Skynyrd — but they don't leave themselves enough room to develop them.

Dinner Theatre success

Toronto's Clowns a disarming show

By JAMIE PORTMAN
Southam News Services

TORONTO — It's difficult these days to conjure up much enthusiasm for any project which uses a circus ring and the painted face of a clown as the basis for an allegorical statement about life.

The idea is not exactly a novel one, and it tends to become an excuse for pretentiousness. Furthermore, it has been worked to death by British exhibitionist Anthony Newley in such painfully self-indulgent exercises as Stop The World I Want To Get Off and The Roar Of The Greasepaint.

Yet, one discovers to one's incredulous delight that it is, after all, still possible to be charmed and diverted by this theme. The evidence is available at Anthony's Dinner Theatre in Toronto where a deft and likeable little show called The Clowns has been playing since easrly November.

It's a lovingly assembled effort, its gaudy lights and gaily colored costumes conveying an appropriately circus atmosphere, and its three performers unflaggingly exhillarating.

DISARMING

But it's also a disarming show, offering through the medium of song and dance a simple, little account of how human beings tend to be clowns about love.

Clowns Dean Regan, Jeri Craden, Brian McKay

In terms of narrative, The Clowns is a mere trifle — ingenuous, even naive, in its presentation of a funny-sad romantic triangle. But because this is a musical revue which comes to us without prtensions, we can forgive the inadequacies of Jeri Craden's book and focus on her songs which are warm, beguiling and communicative.

Jeri Craden is not content to be just the author of The Clowns. She also performs in it, and proves to be an effervescent stage talent, providing a splendid complement to her two leading men, Dean Regan and Brian McKay.

Regan, of course, has been a fixture on the Canadian musical theatre scene for more than a decade, and he brings a brash exuberance to the role of a clown who seems capable of winning whatever he demands — including the love of Craden. McKay, by contrast, is the definitive sad-faced clown, yearning for the unattainable, and affectingly symbolizing the perpetual loner in our midst.

TO PLEASE

It's a show which doesn't really say anything new. It does, however, aim to please. And it succeeds again and again. Regan shows why he is Canada's leading song and dance man with an exuberant tap number revealingly titled I Live In A Spotlight. McKay ponders the ways and means of winning a girl in an engagingly rueful song called One Step At A Time.The performers prove as adept in ensemble routines as they are in individual solos; a sequence called A Clown Is A clown Is A Clown is an explosion of sound and color.

Neatly and imaginatively staged by Doug Cowan, and backed up by a sprightly instrumental trit under the leadership of Dave Thompson, The Clowns is a show of many virtues, not the least of which is its modesty.

INTIMATE

It would be swallowed up mercilessly in a larger theatre, but in an intimate cabaret atmosphere it works beautifully. It's a good example of the kind of original Canadian fare which is cropping up with increasing frequency in restaurant rooms throughout Toronto. The phenomenon is one which is peculiarly part of the Toronto scene, and it's surprising that its potential hasn't been recognized in other cities.

Shows like The Clowns and the half-dozen other cabaret performances currently running in Toronto are attracting their own special kind of audience — an audience which, one suspects, rarely attends more conventional theatrical or musical fare. The significance of such enterprises is not to be underrated.

Gropus 7 may steal laurels from SMCQ

By JACOB SISKIND
of The Gazette

Last night's concert by the Societe de musique contemporaine du Quebec was a program with a difference.

To begin with, it was presented by a new, young group of performers who call themselves Gropus 7. Within a few seconds of the opening of their performance it was apparent that Serge Garant and the old guard of the SMCQ had best look to their laurels.

This young troupe may well steal the SMCQ's thunder if it keeps presenting concerts like the one last night.

From the purely visual point of view this event was way ahead of anything previously seen at these concerts and from the point of view of professionalism they had the oldsters beaten hands down. The evening moved like greased lightning. There were no long pauses while instruments were shifted about. Everything had been planned in advance.

Model program

And the program itself was a model of what these things should be. There were two of the Sequenza by Luciano Berio (I and III) and there were two versions of the Pas de cinq by Maurizio Kagel.

Neither of the Berio pieces was new and both received exemplary performances. Indeed last night the Sequenza III was given a more persuasive performance than the familiar one by Cathy Berberian, to whom the score was dedicated.

But it was the Kagel dus that was the pièce de resistance. The two versions of the same work — one for performers behind a screen and the other a purely visual realization of the same text — were a constant source of hilarity.

In its instrumental version, as prepared by Gropus 7 with the apparent approval of the composer, the sounds suggested a variety of strong visual images. At the outset there was a Hollywood western shootout, followed by the galloping of horses across the terrain. Then the scene shifted to a Chinese restaurant.

All of this was difficult to reconcile with the silhouette of the shapely female on the scrim hiding the instruments, but it was fascinating.

Then, the cavalry came to the rescue, complete with bugles and auto horns and before you knew it the cows came home along with the guy who blows his trumpet top at the hockey games at the Forum, while the baby doll kept crying.

After a pause we were back with the Western, but this time we got Chinese water torture instead of the restaurant and after that I began to allow my mind to wander.

The purely visual version did not live up to this libretto, even if it was every bit as zany.

The five people on the stage seemed totally unrelated. There was the delayed adolescent with her hoop and yo-yo. There was the weight lifter who insisted on puffing his cigar. There was the boy in the gilded cage, the girl in her tutu and point shoes. And finally there was the old dame with the rose in her teeth.

What transpired as these people shuffled their feet around the pentagon described on the stage is really meaningless. The performance was, as is so often the case in these pieces, as much the reaction of the audience as the events on view.

The whole was a good deal of fun and for the most part enjoyable on at least two levels — pure entertainment and devastating parody.

Now, if Gropus 7 can start its own series of concerts in competition with the old guard at the SMCQ, things musical will really start hopping in this city.

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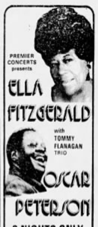

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